

Utah County Academy of Sciences 940 West 800 South Orem, Utah 84058

April 3, 2008





Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

Utah County Academy of Sciences 940 West 800 South Orem, UT 84058

April 3, 2008

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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State Superintendent of Public Instruction

DIVISION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

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FOREWORD

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 3, 2008, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Utah County Academy of Sciences is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Clark Baron is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Utah County Academy of Sciences, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Utah County Academy of Sciences.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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UTAH COUNTY ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Utah County Academy of Sciences is to provide a quality public education to a diverse student population emphasizing science and technology in a safe, supportive environment allowing students to earn two years of college credit and their high school diploma in a dual campus setting.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

UCAS believes that:

- 1. Highly qualified teachers promote student learning by using a variety of teaching methods.
- 2. Students need to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through solving problems and producing quality work.
- 3. Diversity is an asset to education.
- 4. A quality education provides a solid foundation for the future of the student and is vital to the growth and success of society.
- 5. A safe, comfortable, and supportive environment will promote positive learning, positive relationships, and mutual respect.
- 6. High school students are capable of doing college level work, making appropriate decision, and becoming confident, self-directed, lifelong learners.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

- 1. Acquire, organize, and evaluate information: set and accomplish goals; solve problems, and make informed decisions.
- 2. Develop and demonstrate positive character traits including self-discipline, integrity, responsibility, mutual respect, and the ability and willingness to work productively with others.

3.	Communicate clearly and effectively: creating, designing and presenting all assignments, projects in a pleasing and professional manner.

Date of Visit: April 3, 2008

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ted P. Lovato, Accreditation Consultant, Utah State Office of Education, Northwest Association of Accredited Schools, Visiting Team Chairperson

Kathleen Crapo, Assistant Principal, A.M.E.S. Early College High School

Jeannie Rowland, Specialist, Charter School Office, Utah State Office of Education

VISITING TEAM REPORT

UTAH COUNTY ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

The Utah County Academy of Sciences (UCAS) is a public charter school, and is one of the six Early College High Schools in Utah. UCAS started operations in the spring of 2004. UCAS partners with Utah Valley State College (UVSC), and Alpine, Nebo, and Provo School Districts. UVSC will soon become Utah Valley University. The focus of UCAS is math, science, and technology. UCAS offers opportunities to earn an associate's degree for its current 330 students in grades 10, 11, and 12; pays for all approved courses taken on the UVSC campus; and purchases college textbooks. All students are UVSC students, with activity cards and UVA bus passes. UCAS has a rigorous curriculum, and the caring and competent faculty is a very strong asset of the UCAS community.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

The profile explains the history of the school and provides comprehensive faculty information, valuable student demographic data and practicable curriculum information. Viable information about the strong qualifications of the leaders and educational staff is well presented.

Students are fortunate to have the ability to take UVSC courses for an enriched curriculum. Whereas one of ten reasons for attending UCAS is to "assist underserved populations to 'jump start' their college education," more emphasis could be given to making sure that the underprivileged are able to do so.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

The school profile might have included more comprehensive evidence of student achievement, special programs and events, information on student council, extracurricular programs, assessment strategies, and so forth. UCAS appears to have a warm, competent, and outgoing staff and student body supported by a group of salient parent leaders. Expectations are high. More information would provide a complete picture of UCAS.

c) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

The focus group report was insightful for the Visiting Team. The various stakeholders recognize the strength of the partnership between UCAS and UVSC.

Students are offered a rigorous curriculum and have the advantage of taking diverse classes on the UVSC campus. Leadership and counseling are strong assets of UCAS.

One limitation that was acknowledged during the visit, but there was very little indication in the profile of the need for an expanded facility with larger classes and hallways.

The Visiting Team recommends that more attention be given to fulfilling the part of the mission "to provide a quality public education to a diverse student population." Consideration could be given to attracting more females and minorities, both of which are underrepresented groups at UCAS.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- UCAS focuses on math, science, and technology, while students "interested in sports, music programs, drama, debate, etc. are encouraged to remain at their local comprehensive high school." Consideration may be given to offering more extracurricular opportunities to students in order to educate the "whole child." Students interviewed desired additional extracurricular opportunities on the UCAS campus, even though they are offered abundant opportunities at their boundary schools.
- The facilities are limited for student movement and classroom comfort. Part of the action plan could be to plan for more comfortable and accessible facilities. Whereas UCAS is proud of its science and math curriculum, it was noted that labs are lacking and need to be updated. The school is adding a new building that will offer all stakeholders valuable and practicable space and should become a very positive addition to the campus.

CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

Mission, Beliefs and Desired Results for Student Learning (DRSLs):

a) To what degree were the school's mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs developed and/or revised collaboratively by the school community to define a compelling purpose and vision for the school and to support student achievement?

The School Community Council, PTSA, faculty, students, and Board of Trustees all contributed to the development of the mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs

for the Utah County Academy of Sciences. The institution of Utah County Academy of Sciences has set forth a clear vision to support student learning.

b) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's DRSLs?

The school's mission, beliefs, and DRSLs are wholly aligned, providing support and rationale for each piece. An eye single to the mission will lead Utah County Academy of Sciences to successful completion of its DRSLs.

c) Describe the indicators (measures) that have been developed to assess the school's progress in assessing the DRSLs.

Most indicators are visibly measurable. SEOP planning and follow-through, completion of classroom assignments and college course assignments, and 90 percent of higher attendance goals will no doubt be tracked. A significant strength for Utah County Academy of Sciences is collecting data. However, the Visiting Team recommends that the remaining indicators express the quantitative data expected to determine success. Teachers, in the self-study document, expressed concern with assessment data "not being sufficiently interpreted and presented in a clear and concise manner"; in addition, they expressed the opinion that there is a need for more time and resources to organize and analyze data.

d) To what extent do the school's mission, beliefs, and DRSLs guide the procedures, policies and decisions of the school, and appear evident in the culture of the school?

The Visiting Team found it clearly evident that Utah County Academy of Sciences uses its mission, beliefs, and DRSLs to guide the procedures and policies of the school. The culture is an accurate, positive, reflection of the school's goals and beliefs.

More information could have been provided on how teachers plan to embody the DRSLs in their curricular strategies.

Curriculum:

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards, the Utah Core Curriculum, reflecting the Utah Life Skills: A Guide to Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Success?

Little attention was given to the use of *Life Skills: A Guide to Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Success.* The accreditation team suggests that professional development opportunities be provided for teachers to become aware of the

document and to implement the curriculum in classroom instruction and the overall culture of the school.

b) To what extent does the curriculum engage **all** students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills?

UCAS does an excellent job in this area. Students are provided with the opportunity to receive an associate's degree by the opportunities allowed through partnership with UVSC instructors. The Visiting Team observed a highly qualified and enthusiastic faculty providing an educational environment where students can thrive. However, whether **all** students are engaged is questionable, since data is yet to be analyzed in an in-depth and useful manner.

c) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's DRSLs?

The DRSLs were created in a process that included "employees, parents and students... after faculty input, they were again revised and approved." This was a collaborative effort. It appears that two meetings were devoted to creating the DRSLs. UCAS is encouraged to keep working on the achievement of its goals and indicators. The DRSLs may be revisited from time to time.

d) How does the staff use assessments to drive curriculum to ensure that **all** students can reach the intended learning outcomes?

The staff members noted in the focus group report that they would like more explanation and analysis of their data. They want "a better understanding of all subcategories and classifications of students, and better data about how they are doing." They also would like the information through COGNOS reports. Finally, they would like time and resources to organize and analyze data.

In summary, the curriculum would benefit from more training and understanding of data to improve the curriculum. Time for staff meetings to discuss this information would be helpful.

Instruction:

a) To what extent do teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to enhance student learning?

The faculty of UCAS is one of the school's stronger assets, since the instructors offer students a variety of instructional strategies learned over many years of experience at different grade levels. Many of the teachers are college instructors and seem to enjoy their association with the UCAS students. The administration trusts the teachers to make sound decisions about instruction and student progress,

but at the same time they are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction. Students interviewed by the Visiting Team expressed gratitude regarding the variety of instruction that takes place at UCAS.

b) To what extent have the school and the staff developed strategies for instruction that build the capacity for explicitly teaching the identified DRSL in every classroom?

There is little evidence in the self-study document to show that the school and the staff have developed strategies for instruction to meet the admirable goals set forth in the DRSLs. The indicators for the DRSLs are well articulated, but there was little printed information to assist the Visiting Team in responding to this question.

c) To what extent is the school's professional development program guided by identified instructional needs, and how does it provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies that support student learning?

Teachers stated in the self-study survey that professional development activities in which they participated within the past two years were beneficial to them as teachers. In addition, they felt that the professional development activities in which they participated focused on enhancing their skills as instructional leaders. There is a strong belief among teachers that enhancing teacher knowledge and skills receives priority as the most important strategy to improve student achievement.

d) To what extent are teachers proficient in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflective on their own practices?

There is evidence, when talking to community members, especially students, that UCAS teachers are proficient in their content area and, because of the strong partnership with UVSC, are knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches. Most of the classes taught at the school are concurrent enrollment, or are taught on the campus and controlled exclusively by the departments and professors.

e) To what extent does the school effectively implement a well-defined plan for the integration of technology into its curriculum, instruction, and assessments?

The school is well equipped with necessary technology to meet the various needs of students and teachers. Excellent lab equipment has either been purchased or donated. UCAS students have the UVSC Math Lab available to them and the UVSC Assessment Center tests all students for college placement.

There are some weaknesses, especially a lack of laboratory space due to small classrooms, and the class period is too short for completion of most extended labs.

Assessment:

α) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments with performance standards based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?

In the self-study document, the faculty and administration admit to having a large amount of data at their disposal, but only have a "general idea" how well their students are doing. They concede that the data has not been sufficiently interpreted and presented in a clear and concise manner.

b) To what extent does the school have a process to fairly and equitably assess school-wide and individual progress in achieving academic expectations?

This appears to be a weakness, but the school staff is probing ways to correct this. They are asking valid questions to gain the information they need to know; for example, how do the male students' scores compare to those of females? How do economically disadvantaged students compare with the rest of the student population? How do the school's minorities do? The school admits to needing a better understanding of all subcategories and classifications of students and better data about how the students are doing.

c) To what extent does the professional staff use data to assess the success of the school in achieving its academic expectations?

See *a*) and *b*) above. In the self-study, it is stated that the staff believes "state and school records are housed in Salt Lake City at the USOE. Thus they are hard to access." In addition, the staff believes that they "need time or resources to organize and analyze data."

The school does administer the UBSCT (all UCAS students have passed), Skill Certification Tests, Criterion-Referenced Tests (End-of-Level Tests), ACT, LAN, and PSAT/NMSQT, and receives data regarding Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). It is apparent to the Visiting Team that the data is there but needs to be used as a powerful tool to improve instruction.

d) To what extent does the school's professional development program allow for opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies?

Action Plan #2 will address the use of data to improve students' academic performance. There are plans to make assessment data available to UCAS

teachers, parents and students. In addition, the plan involves instructing teachers on how to use all assessment data. From there, the faculty will take the necessary steps to improve student performance. The end of the timeline listed is September 1, 2008.

e) To what extent is there organizational agreement on the use of a school-wide scoring tool to assess the identified DRSL?

It is apparent that the school staff has identified this as a weakness and is ready to change it. A school-wide scoring tool to assess the identified DRSLs is in the works. The action plan outlines steps, a timeline, persons responsible, resources required, and the evaluation of the plan's completion status.

CHAPTER 3: NAAS SUPPORT STANDARDS

Leadership and Organization:

a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate that actively supports teaching and learning?

With four dedicated administrators/counselors at the helm, quality teaching and learning is a priority. Each leader is keenly aware of the activities within each classroom, as well as strengths and areas needing support for each staff member, and provides and organizes weekly staff meetings focusing on various content areas.

b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative to monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness?

The Visiting Team witnessed an effort by the school leadership to improve data gathering and to use it effectively to improve instruction and increase student achievement. Each member is aware of general student achievement and instructional effectiveness through anecdotal information, as well as conversations with staff and students. However, it has been recommended that the collected data be analyzed to gain a clear understanding of actual success. The self-study document reveals that "data has not been sufficiently interpreted and presented in a clear and concise manner."

The UCAS staff is fortunate to have the strong partnership with UVSC, which can provide data-driven, research-based material to assist in the overall effort.

c) To what extent does the leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and allocation and use of resources at the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment which aligns with the school goals, DRSLs, and school improvement?

The teachers at Utah County Academy of Sciences feel supported and safe in their endeavors to procure needed resources, and express input; they trust the leadership of the school. Each operational and organizational procedure is managed in an equitable fashion, with the use of the goals and DRSLs as guidelines.

The administration is cognizant of the challenge of maintaining a strong resource base, and is working to keep the school in a strong financial state.

d) To what extent does the school leadership empower the entire school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning through meaningful roles in the decision-making process?

The members of the leadership at Utah County Academy of Sciences are flexible guides, empowering the school community to collaborate and confidently take responsibility for student learning. It was evident to the Visiting Team that the teachers were committed to the students' learning and achievement through acknowledgement and guidance specific to individual students. Students have meaningful relationships with the staff, and are committed to tackling the rigorous academics and high expectations because of the trust and obvious care of the teachers.

e) To what extent has the school established a formal system through which each student has an adult staff member who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning?

The three counselors, who are very well respected at Utah County Academy of Sciences, know every student by name; they know the goals and directions of each student, and have created a climate of confidence allowing students to rely on their guidance. The Visiting Team witnessed the interaction between the students and counselors firsthand, solidifying knowledge of students' placement within the school-wide community. The principal even has his computer screensaver set to rotate pictures and names of students to ensure recognition and familiarity with all students. The leadership is clearly dedicated to providing positive and supportive adult relationships with the students. The teachers are highly respected by the students and play important roles in their lives.

School Services:

This standard is dealt with in the school's NAAS annual report, which requires specific responses and information regarding student support services, guidance services, health services, library information services, special education services, and family and community services.

Facilities and Finances:

This standard is addressed in the school's annual report to NAAS, which requires specific responses regarding the physical plant, finances, audit of school records, advertising, etc.

CHAPTER 4: NAAS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STANDARD

Culture of Continual Improvement:

- a) To what extent has the school developed and implemented a comprehensive school improvement plan using Collaborating for Student Achievement, the Utah accreditation/school improvement process, that is reviewed and revised on an ongoing basis?
 - The school improvement plan was guided, in part, by *Collaborating for Student Achievement*. UCAS is encouraged to refer to this document as the school collaborates with stakeholders for student success in the years to come.
- b) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through an aligned and ongoing professional development plan focused on the school's goals for improvement?
 - More information about professional development opportunities would be helpful. The Visiting Team did not review a specific plan or calendar. The teacher survey, however, did mention a general satisfaction with professional development activities. Focus groups reported that they would like time together to study data, for instance. Articulation from grade to grade would be helpful with on-campus courses. Teachers mentioned interest in the use of rubrics.
 - In summary, professional development calendars or agendas could be created to meet the stated needs of the educational team.
- c) To what extent is the new/revised school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up and is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?

Based on conversations with the administration and teachers—and as outlined in the action plan—UCAS has a strong commitment to follow up on the school plan. UCAS is commended for doing the accreditation work earlier than necessary, but another year would have provided valuable base-line data. It is obvious that the administration and teachers are committed to the school and community.

To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

The community is strongly involved in the well-being of the school. UCAS is commended for its strong partnership with UVSC. It appears that this partnership will continue to develop and expand in the coming years. The Visiting Team had the opportunity to meet with the president of the college, and it was clear that his support of UCAS is very strong and that he is committed to the further growth of the partnership. The Visiting Team believes this will be an outstanding school as it evolves and continues to overcome the challenges the obstacles it faces.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

a) To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?

UCAS has a very productive partnership with Alpine, Nebo, and Provo School Districts and a strong partnership with Utah Valley State College (soon to be Utah Valley University). Two UVSC administrators sit on the UCAS Board of Trustees. In addition, UVSC provides police, fire, custodial, and maintenance services for UCAS.

b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

Not only does UCAS have collaborative partnerships with the educational entities mentioned above, but the school also has a partnership with the Gates Foundation, which provided the school with \$500,000 in startup money. In addition, Micron, IM Flash Technologies, and IBM have donated resources to UCAS. The school would do well to partner with the local business community to ensure future funding for the school.

c) To what extent has the school engaged the school community in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?

Parental involvement is strong at UCAS. The school's staff receives valuable feedback from all of its parent groups, especially during the self-study process. The UCAS Board of Trustees is a viable and strong supporter of the school. The UCAS Community Council meets every month and provides valuable observations and information for the school. The UCAS parent-teacher-student organization is well organized, and raises funds to support teachers and students in everything from open houses to teacher appreciation efforts and student scholarships.

d) How are results of school improvement identified, documented, used, and communicated to **all** stakeholders?

The school uses a newsletter and has a viable and well-designed website to communicate with parents. In addition, parent-teacher conferences are a feasible and practical way to increase communication efforts.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends Utah County Academy of Sciences for the extensive opportunities provided to students, such as the ability to earn an associate's degree in conjunction with their high school diploma, the highly competent faculty and administration, and the strong guidance and counseling department, which provides detailed college and career planning assistance.
- The Visiting Team commends Utah County Academy of Sciences' caring faculty for the vast experience and profound knowledge of its area of instruction. There is a high level of practical application for the students due to the faculty's extensive real-life experience.
- The Visiting Team commends Utah County Academy of Sciences for extensive and active parental involvement through the monthly meetings of the PTSO, School Community Council, Board of Trustees, and evident open-door policy.
- The Visiting Team commends the Utah County Academy of Sciences staff for the preparation and guidance offered to students in order to gain the skills necessary to succeed in a college career, such as independence, self-motivation, and the confidence to navigate a college campus. The strong partnership with Utah Valley State College (soon to be Utah Valley State University) is highly commendable.

- The Visiting Team commends Utah County Academy of Sciences for the high expectations and rigor that accompany each academic subject.
- The Visiting Team commends Utah County Academy of Sciences for the positive, close-knit climate allowing students to feel comfortable with their peers, as well as having confidence in approaching staff and faculty for assistance.
- The Visiting Team commends Utah County Academy of Sciences for providing continual professional development to meet the specific content needs of teachers, as well as boosting morale and maintaining a positive attitude. This directly affects student achievement in a positive way.
- The Visiting Team commends Utah County Academy of Sciences for the new facility that will be completed in August 2008. This will provide much-needed space for a gymnasium, lunchroom, assembly hall, and commons area.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that the UCAS community, as a whole, seek
 ways to improve and enlarge the current physical plant to better meet the
 educational needs of the students.
- The Visiting Team recommends that UCAS expend a greater effort in connecting with business partnerships to seek resources for the school and for student scholarships and grants.
- The Visiting Team recommends that UCAS reach out to enroll a more diverse and underserved population, as stated in the UCAS mission statement. In addition, the school should make a greater effort to enroll students who are academically lacking (e.g., students who may be deficient in math credits or have other prohibiting factors).
- The Visiting Team recommends that the UCAS administration and teachers collaborate in planning professional development time for the purpose of reviewing and utilizing the valuable student assessment data and surveys the school currently has.